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Empire and Citizenship¹

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Empire, by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is a breathtakingly ambitious and original analysis of contemporary political economy. Painted with broad strokes it is both rich and frustrating. *Empire* self-consciously (some might say arrogantly) seeks to update Marx and Engels' analyses of capitalism for the era of globalisation. In stark contrast to the authors of *The Communist Manifesto*, however, Hardt and Negri deliberately offer few normative prescriptions for the future direction of radical politics. Nonetheless, one unequivocal demand is for the institution of 'global citizenship'. In this short commentary I discuss the role of citizenship in *Empire* and counter-*Empire*.²

Hardt and Negri's demand resonates with the work of a number of other contemporary writers such as Heater (2002) on 'world citizenship', Falk (1994) and Urry (2000,172-86) on 'global citizenship', Hutchings and Dannreuther (1998) and their contributors on 'cosmopolitan citizenship', Soysal (1994) on 'post-national citizenship', and Kaldor (2003) and Keane (2003) on 'global civil society.' Citizenship is thus a theme where Hardt and Negri's concerns intersect with a particular (and particularly lively) set of current social scientific debates. Although they come to the problem from a variety of positions, all these writers acknowledge the limitations of conventional citizenship, circumscribed as it is by the territoriality of the modern nation-state, but they also recognise the political power of citizenship as an

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² All page numbers in the text refer to citations of Hardt and Negri (2000).

idea and an ideal. From this recognition has come much rethinking of the concept, which has sought to retain citizenship's radical promise as a relationship of equality founded on shared rights, while freeing it from its more conservative overtones that derive largely from its status as a tool of state power. Whereas for many writers the realisation of 'global citizenship' or one of its close relatives depends on the better functioning or the reworking of institutions of global governance – such as the United Nations – Hardt and Negri conceive of global citizenship as the possession (or promise) of a global social collective: 'the multitude'. As with many other aspects of *Empire* then, their comments on citizenship simultaneously chime with, but also represent a radical departure from, current academic and political debate.

Like other political theorists and activists working in a loosely defined postmodern idiom, Hardt and Negri eschew the elaboration of a conventional political programme. Not for them vanguardist ponderings on 'what is to be done?' nor even the concern with manifestos evident in the student and worker uprisings of May 1968 and their aftermath (notwithstanding the evident connections between those politics and the arguments of *Empire*). No, for Hardt and Negri, resistance to the restless dynamic of Empire defies straightforward prescription and organization. Counter-Empire is immanent in Empire and cannot be defined outside the social processes through which it becomes:

Even when we manage to touch on the productive, ontological dimension of the problematic and the resistances that arise there, however, we will still not be in the position – not even at the end of this book – to point to any already existing and concrete elaboration of a political alternative to Empire. And no such effective blueprint will ever arise from a theoretical articulation such as ours. It will arise only in practice (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 206).

Thus, for Hardt and Negri Empire is paradoxical. Their use of the term is in some respects counter-intuitive. Contemporary Empire is not like past empires. This is not the United States' Empire, in the sense that one may speak of the British or Portuguese Empires. This difference matters to debates about citizenship. British imperial rule did not bring equality of status, but all members of the population were subjects of the Crown. In Empire today, there is no Crown or Presidency and thus no immediately available institutional relationship between people and Empire. For Hardt and Negri, therefore, the demand for global citizenship is not for rights and recognition within an institutional polity (Empire is nonesuch), but is rather a moment of counter-Empire — the being-within-and-against Empire that Hardt and Negri highlight. There is nowhere outside from which a counter-offensive might be waged, so counter-Empire comes from within, and yet it is also the antithesis of Empire. But since it can emerge 'only in practice' its appearance can neither be predicted nor described in advance.

While this may frustrate many on the left for whom the loss of faith in statist versions of socialism represented a simultaneous process of political disorientation, it will seem far less problematic to those engaged actively in myriad rhizomatic struggles

in-and-against Empire. To take just one among dozens of possible examples, People's Global Action (PGA) (which *does* offer a manifesto, but not one with any kind of blueprint) emphasises that:

There are many diverse ways of resistance against capitalist globalisation and its consequences. At an individual level, we need to transform our daily lives, freeing ourselves from market laws and the pursuit of private profit. At the collective level, we need to develop a diversity of forms of organisation at different levels, acknowledging that there is no single way of solving the problems we are facing (People's Global Action, 2002).

The mobile, tactical engagements and resistances produced by networks such as People's Global Action are means without ends, if 'ends' implies clearly defined policy objectives or strategic goals. To some extent this makes a virtue of necessity — any attempt by such a diverse and dispersed movement to agree a common platform concerning the substantive character of an alternative social order would be doomed to failure. But it is also principled, embracing the creative potential of decentralized participatory action and recognising that the movement's autonomist spirit would be crushed by the imposition of a conventional political programme.

Hardt and Negri's reluctance to set forth a normative model is thus in keeping with the political practices of movements working against contemporary neo-liberal forms of globalization. At the same time they do offer some (highly schematic and generalised) propositions concerning the political demands of the multitude, "the set of all the exploited and the subjugated" (p. 393). Although they mention it only briefly, Hardt and Negri are clear that foremost among these is the demand of the multitude for *global citizenship*.

The figure of the multitude is central to Hardt and Negri's politics. Taking their cue from Hobbes they contrast the idea of 'the multitude' with that of 'the people': "whereas the multitude is an inconclusive constituent relation, the people is a constituted synthesis that is prepared for sovereignty" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 103). 'The people' is closely and powerfully linked with the idea of the nation. Together, 'the people' and 'the nation' form the basis of modern *national* citizenship. The modern state is a 'sovereignty machine' — the key mechanism for the production of the striated space of modernity marked by the division of the world into state territories and national peoples. National peoples take shape as national citizenries, and citizenship thereby becomes a tool of state power and a further expression of sovereignty. By contrast the multitude owes no allegiance (except perhaps to itself). This is why using the idea of the multitude as the basis for the demand for 'global citizenship' is a potentially radical manoeuvre, because it detaches citizenship from institutionalized sovereignties.

The link between people and nation is by no means a mystical one. Drawing on Foucault, Hardt and Negri identify the particular biopolitical technologies that enable the 'production of social reality' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 22). Such a biopolitical approach can also clarify the production of 'the people' as a 'constitutive

synthesis.’ One of the paradoxes of the modern conception of citizenship is that it controls as it liberates and excludes as it includes. The concept of the disciplinary society and its transition towards the society of control captures these mechanisms precisely. Disciplinary society operates through specific institutions (prisons, factories, asylums, hospitals, universities, schools) and these institutions are also those through which the duties of citizenship are inculcated. This is obvious and well documented in the case of the educational system, but the other institutions are also important: just consider the notion of the ‘upstanding citizen’ – one who takes responsibility seriously, works hard (in a factory), observes the law (or faces prison), behaves rationally (or is condemned to the asylum) and so on. Although not elaborated in such terms in *Empire*, it seems clear that the doctrine of modern citizenship is central to ordering of populations by the sovereignty machine, for the production of peoples, and for the generation of the striated space of modernity.

According to Hardt and Negri, there is an epochal passage from the disciplinary society to the society of control in which “mechanisms of command become ever more ‘democratic’, ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens” (p. 23) rather than through the functioning of specific institutional technologies. This shift, they claim, “develops at the far edge of modernity and opens towards the postmodern” (p. 23). Operating through “flexible and fluctuating networks” (p. 23) and thereby breaking free from (inevitably territorialized) institutions, the emergence of the society of control is a corollary of de-territorialized Empire as well as of the “axiomatic logic of capital” (p. 331). This transition also involves what Hardt and Negri claim is a transformation in the nature of social space from the striated space of modernity to the “smooth space” of post-modernity. Unsurprisingly, many geographers are unhappy with the concept of “smooth space.” They emphasize that globalization and post-modernism involve processes of re-territorialization as well as de-territorialization. Such objections are important, but here I want to pursue the implications for citizenship.

If modern citizenship is intimately linked to the functioning of disciplinary society, the two being partly mutually constituting, can a similar relationship be identified between post-modern (or global) citizenship and the society of control? In fact the homology between modern citizenship/disciplinary society and global citizenship/society of control is imperfect. While there is a juridical distinction between citizenship (as a legal category) and national identity (as a cultural category), the formation of citizens has always been part of the national(ist) project. Nonetheless at certain moments the development of citizenship has had radical democratic implications. The doctrine of equality among fellow citizens, for example, was a fundamental challenge to feudal forms of rule. The resources provided by the acquisition of citizenship have fuelled rights-based movements for liberation, and still today the civil rights associated with modern citizenship do offer important protection from the arbitrary use of state power. At the same time, Hardt and Negri are unequivocal in their view that the nation has had its day. They write, “we believe it is a grave mistake to harbour any nostalgia for the power of the nation-state or to resurrect any politics that celebrates the nation” (p. 336).

Global citizenship, by contrast does not appear, at least so far, to be a similar governmental technology in the society of control. Rather it is a technology of resistance, albeit one whose geographies are aligned with Empire's logic of capital. Is global citizenship a functional necessity for the fulfilment of Empire, in the way that national citizenship was functional to the formation of the modern nation-state? Not yet. "Empire, despite its efforts, finds it impossible to construct a system of right adequate to the new reality of globalization [as a result of] the revolutionary nature of the multitude whose struggles have produced Empire as an inversion of its own image and who now represents an uncontrollable force and an excess of value with respect to every form of right and law" (p. 394). In other words, Empire does not interpellate the multitude as a global citizenry, rather the multitude "is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them" (p. 393).

This means that global citizenship is a demand *of* the multitude itself, rather than an obligation placed on the multitude by Empire. Empire finds it more and more difficult to enforce the orderings implied by modern state-based citizenship, but politically unable to grant global citizenship. As a result nation-states engage in ever more frantic efforts to draw untenable distinctions between worthy and unworthy migrants: between 'genuine' refugees and 'bogus' asylum seekers; between the highly skilled and the unskilled; between the deserving and the undeserving poor.

In this context the demand '*papiers pour tous*' is genuinely revolutionary. It is through restless "circulation [that] the multitude reappropriates space and constitutes itself as an active subject" (p. 397) and it is through asserting the right to control its own movement that it constitutes itself politically. Initially therefore global citizenship involves the acquisition of citizenship rights on the basis of residence, rather than nationality. Its subsequent development involves the right to move at will. The unwillingness or inability of Empire to grant global citizenship on these terms is evidence of the awkward relationship between bio-politics (the governance of the multitude) and political economy (the logic of capital). The logic of capital may imply the freedom of circulation of productive bodies, but the bio-political reality of the multitude seems too disruptive for Empire to allow it.

Such is Hardt and Negri's suggestive, but necessarily incomplete, politics, which inevitably raises more questions than it answers. First, we may wonder what is the process through which the demand for global citizenship may be advanced? The development of national citizenship offers few clues, working as it did in the spaces of the institutionalised state. Movements such as People's Global Action and initiatives such as the World Social Forum may be part of the process, but their relationship to the multitude remains unclear. Second, the demand for full citizenship rights in the country of residence certainly calls into question the national basis of modern citizenship, but it is a mark of modern citizenship that its rights vary widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Crudely, some citizenships are more desirable than others and the state remains the provider of those rights, even if the definition of the recipients has changed. Third, national imaginaries retain a profound hold on our consciousness, including on the consciousness of the multitude. Migrant people may be keen to acquire some of the rights of European citizenship (for example); they do

not necessarily want to become European. After all, in many cases Europe has been target of *national* projects of liberation from colonial oppression. The nation ultimately may be doomed, but there seems to be some life in it yet.

Finally, there is a paradox at the heart of the idea of global citizenship, revealed by critiques of current international human rights law. At present, international humanitarian law, which ostensibly guarantees and underpins universal rights regardless of residence or nationality, is in practice a key technology of the production of empire, rather than an obvious starting point for the development of counter-Empire. After all, it is appeals to universal human rights that form the basis of the 'exceptions' and 'police actions' that Hardt and Negri identify as central to the emergence of Empire. Among the justifications offered for military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, is the enforcement of the rights of the Afghan and Iraqi people to live free from tyranny and to join the 'free world' (another name for Empire). It seems that embryonic forms of global citizenship have become integral to the dynamics of Empire itself. Whether the multitude can yet turn them against Empire remains to be seen.

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